

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

Minutes
Thursday 27 January 2022
Via Videoconference

Present

UK Statistics Authority

Sir David Norgrove (Chair)
Sian Jones (Deputy Chair)
Professor Sir John Aston
Sam Beckett
Helen Boaden
Professor Sir Ian Diamond
Richard Dobbs
Ed Humpherson
Nora Nanayakkara
Professor Sir David Spiegelhalter
Professor Anne Trefethen

Also in attendance

Penny Babb (for item 10)
Nick Bateson
Owen Brace
Robert Bumpstead
Mike Keoghan (for items 9)
Donna Leong (for item 9)
Alison Pritchard
Emma Rourke (for item 11)

Apologies

Professor Jonathan Haskel

1. Apologies

1.1 Apologies were received from Professor Jonathan Haskel.

2. Declarations of Interest

2.1 There were no new declarations of interest.

3. Minutes and matters arising from previous meeting

3.1 The minutes of the previous meeting held on 25 November were agreed.

4. Report from the Authority Chair

4.1 Non-Executives had met prior to the Board meeting. They had discussed pre-release access.

4.2 The Chair reported on his recent activities since the board last met highlighting:

- i. Sir David had written to the Secretary of State for Justice on 26 November regarding the disclosure of statistics before their official publication on 25 November;
- ii. on 29 November Sir David alongside Professor Sir Ian Diamond and Sam Beckett had attended a meeting with the Cabinet Secretary and Alex Chisolm, Chief Operating Officer for the Civil Service, regarding the work by ONS throughout the pandemic; and
- iii. Sir David had met Martin Weale, the newly appointed Chair of the National Statistician's Committee for Advice on Standards for Economic Statistics.

4.3 The Chair noted that the recently appointed Deputy National Statisticians, Pete Benton, Health Population and Methods and Mike Keoghan, Economic and Social Statistics, would attend Board meetings for specific agenda items relating to their directorates.

4.4 The Chair noted the article in The Economist on 22 January, 'Britain's Office for National Statistics did well during the pandemic', which reflected the work by ONS during the pandemic including the COVID-19 Infection Survey (CIS), Real Time Indicators and the Data Science Campus.

4.5 It was agreed that the February Board meeting would be held in the Newport office, subject to easing of restrictions in Wales.

5. Report from the Chief Executive [SA(22)01]

5.1 Sir Ian provided the Board with an overview of activity and issues since the last meeting, highlighting the following:

- i. the positive 2021 departmental People Survey results, maintaining the high level of engagement achieved in the previous year and remaining significantly higher than the Civil Service Average;
- ii. the impact and expansion of the Policy Liaison Unit (PLU), which had been established in 2020 to help support the response to COVID-19 with high quality ONS data, insight and analysis;
- iii. five ONS employees had been recognised for their contributions to statistics, public health and the census in the 2022 New Year's Honours list: Alex Lambert, Will Marks, Owen Abbott and Henrie Brown were each awarded the OBE and Arron Maspero an MBE; and
- iv. progress of work in relation to the labour market to understand the increase in the over 50 age demographic who were now not in employment.

5.2 The Board heard that a blog by Pete Benton would be published on 28 January, setting out how this year, with new census outputs and new data sources the ONS would deliver richer and more timely insights of the population.

- 5.3 The Board commended the ONS on their recent engagement on the topic of inflation and cost of living. The Board heard that the more detailed analysis of inflation, which had been suspended during the pandemic would be re-introduced.
- 5.4 Board members discussed the response by ONS to the Freedom of Information request in relation to ONS statistics regarding covid deaths, and subsequent blog by James Tucker published on 26 January.
- 6. Report from the Director General for Regulation [SA(22)02]**
- 6.1 Ed Humpherson provided an update on regulation activity highlighting the statement issued on 26 January: *OSR welcomes ONS blog on Covid-19 deaths: to say only 17,000 people have died from Covid-19 is highly misleading*. Ed Humpherson noted that it was an example of a producer of statistics stepping in to address the misuse of statistics in public debate.
- 6.2 The Board heard that Ed Humpherson and Sir Ian had met the Auditor General for Scotland regarding Scottish Government data. A paper reporting on the progress of the National Statistics Designation Review was scheduled later in the meeting. Business planning for 2022/23 was ongoing with a draft plan scheduled for the March Board meeting. OSR's 2021 People Survey results were positive with further information to be provided at the next meeting.
- 7. Strategy Update [SA(22)03]**
- 7.1 Robert Bumpstead and Nick Bateson introduced a paper which provided an update on progress against the delivery of the Authority strategy, Statistics for the Public Good.
- 7.2 Delivery of the strategy was in its second year with work continuing at pace to deliver the key strategic objectives including amongst others: the provision of regular and timely data through the CIS; and the expansion of the PLU, a flexible agile resource which enabled ONS to enhance the nation's evidence base. It was noted that the 2021 People Survey results reflected the continued high levels of staff engagement across the organisation.
- 7.3 The Board heard that the business planning process was ongoing with a draft ONS Business Plan scheduled for the March Board meeting. The Board would be updated on the plans to celebrate the strategy on its second anniversary at a future meeting.
- 8. Integrated Data Service [SA(22)04]**
- 8.1 Alison Pritchard introduced a paper which provided an update on key elements of the Integrated Data Programme (IDP), highlighting that the IDP Board had agreed the delivery plan for 2022 with delivery on the initial Public Beta capability early summer 2022 and full accredited Public Beta in autumn 2022.
- 8.2 The Board discussed the delivery plan. The Board heard of the approach to data access that was designed to enable quick and secure sharing and analysis of data across departmental boundaries.
- 8.3 The Board would remain engaged in the delivery of the IDS as the work progressed.
- 9. ARIES Programme [SA(22)05]**
- 9.1 Donna Leong introduced a paper which provided an overview of the current position of the Ambitious Radical Inclusive Economic Statistics (ARIES) programme.
- 9.2 The Board heard about progress made since the last update to the Board in September including work on the labour market, prices to incorporate new data sources, public sector finance and National Accounts.
- 9.3 The Board would remain engaged with quarterly updates on progress of the ARIES programme.

10. National Statistics Designation Review [SA(22)06]

- 10.1 Ed Humpherson and Penny Babb introduced a paper which presented proposals for the future presentation and application of the National Statistics (NS) designation.
- 10.2 OSR had undertaken a review of National Statistics Designation, which began in autumn 2019. The process had included roundtable discussions with stakeholders, focus groups with members of the public and research of practices in other countries and regulators. A steering group of experts had been set up to provide challenge as the work developed.
- 10.3 The Board heard that the Regulation Committee had agreed the recommended approach by OSR in its meeting in December 2021.
- 10.4 The Board discussed the proposal and endorsed the recommended approach to emphasise the independent review of official statistics as serving the public good, and approved the recommendation for OSR to begin an implementation project. The Board commended Penny Babb (OSR) and Helen Boaden (Non-Executive Director) who had chaired the steering group.

11. COVID-19 Infection Survey [SA(22)07]

- 11.1 Emma Rourke introduced a paper which provided an update on the CIS programme, highlighting that ONS surveillance studies continued to provide evidence to inform decision making during the rise of the Omicron variant. It was noted that ONS was in discussion with the UK Health Security Agency regarding the CIS beyond March.

12. Any other business

- 12.1 The next meeting would take place on Thursday 24 February 2022.

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

Agenda

27 January 2022, 11.00-14.00

Remote Teams Meeting

Chair: Sir David Norgrove

Apologies: Professor Jonathan Haskel

Attendees: Penny Babb (for item 9), Mike Keoghan (for item 8), Donna Leong (for item 8),
Emma Rourke (for item 10)

NED Session: 10.30-11.00

| | | |
|------------------------------|--|---|
| 1 11.00-11.05 5 mins | Minutes and matters arising from previous meetings Declarations of interest | Meeting of 25 November 2021 |
| 2 11.05-11.15 10 mins | Report from the Authority Chair | Oral report Sir David Norgrove |
| 3 11.15-11.35 20 mins | Report from the Chief Executive | SA(22)01 Prof. Sir Ian Diamond |
| 4 11.35-11.45 10 mins | Report from the Director-General for Regulation | SA(22)02 Ed Humpherson |
| 5 11.45-12.00 15 mins | Report from Committee Chairs <ul style="list-style-type: none">Audit and Risk Assurance CommitteeRegulation Committee | Oral report Nora Nanayakkara Prof. Anne Trefethen |
| 6 12.00-12.15 15 mins | Strategy Update | SA(22)03 Robert Bumpstead Nick Bateson |
| 12.15-12.20 5 mins | Break | |
| 7 12.20-12.35 15 mins | Integrated Data Service | SA(22)04 Alison Pritchard |
| 8 12.35-13.00 25 mins | ARIES Programme | SA(22)05 Donna Leong Mike Keoghan |
| 9 13.00-13.15 15 mins | National Statistics Designation Review | SA(22)06 Ed Humpherson Penny Babb |
| 10 13.15-13.30 15 mins | COVID-19 Infection Survey and Surveillance Studies | SA(22)07 Emma Rourke |
| 11 13.50-14.00 10 mins | Any Other Business | |

Next meeting: Thursday 24 February 2022

Chief Executive's Report, January 2022**Purpose**

1. This provides the Authority Board with an overview of activity and issues for December 2021 and January 2022.

Summary

2. December saw a busy end to year with Alex Chisholm visiting our offices in Newport, the announcement of two new Director Generals, and the publication of the cross Government Statistical Service (GSS) subnational data strategy. The results of the cross-Civil Service People Survey also revealed that we have maintained our high level of engagement, matching our 2020 score, and remaining significantly higher than both 2019 and the Civil Service average.
3. It has also been a quick start to January, with data from across and the ONS informing decisions around both the spread of Omicron and workforce absence. I presented on labour market issues to my fellow Permanent Secretaries and also appeared on BBC News and Sky News to discuss the latest insight from our COVID-19 Infection Survey (CIS). I would like to thank colleagues across ONS who worked through the festive period to deliver this. Finally, I was delighted that five colleagues from ONS were recognised in the 2022 New Year Honours list for public service during the pandemic and 2021 Census.

Review of recent activities

4. The People Survey results for 2021 were extremely positive, maintaining our high level of engagement in 2021 with a score of 70 per cent. This is significantly higher than 2019 (63 per cent) and the Civil Service average (66 per cent). This year we will be focusing on three themes to further improve: Inclusion and Fair Treatment, Leadership and Managing Change, and Organisational Objectives and Purpose. A focus on wellbeing will underpin all of this.
5. We have now received our final Spending Review Settlement letter from HM Treasury,. The settlement and conditions have been agreed and support the future agenda of the organisation, and direction of travel around data sharing and programme delivery. Following this, we are now building our strategic plan for the next three years of Statistics for the Public Good, focusing on our key priorities. I will provide an update on the plan to the Board in February and a final plan in March.
6. We are now working towards the new Private Beta in Spring 2022 with support for up to 40 users across ONS and government, initial Public Beta capability in Summer 2022 with up to 160 users including researchers outside government, and finally a full accredited Public Beta in Autumn 2022 with support for up to 1,000 users in all sectors.
7. The CIS has continued to deliver the gold-standard evidence to inform government decision-making during the rise of the Omicron variant. Throughout December, CIS was able to rapidly provide insight on its spread including publishing interim data on 24 December given the national importance of the data and significant regional variation. We have also moved to publish an additional headline publication two days earlier each Wednesday, in response to the strong demand for evidence. This has only been possible thanks to the dedicated work of various teams across ONS.
8. We are also making good progress on defining the CIS strategy into the new financial year, with a digital collection to offer optimum value for money and to increase the longevity of surveillance.

9. On the Schools Infection Survey 2, wave 1 data collection concluded in December and recruited over 5,000 pupils across 113 schools for antibody and questionnaire data. This included data on mental health, long covid, vaccination and preventative measures. Wave 2 of data collection began 10 January, with 140 schools and over 9000 pupils now registered to participate. This data continues to inform multiple stakeholders.
10. In response to workforce absences and supply chain disruption, we have used CIS data to develop a new model on self-isolation estimates. This is in addition to adapting the Business Insights and Conditions Survey and real-time indicators. Work has so far focused on changing trends and shortages in the labour market, and how this affects different occupations and demographic groups.
11. The ARIES programme has also continued at pace in shaping the Prices Alternative Data Sources project. We have now partnered with a cloud provider to begin a design phase, including several proof of concepts, which will enable us to move to a new cloud-based solution. By using new sources of alternative data such as web-scraping and scanner data, Consumer Prices Index, including owner occupiers' housing costs and Consumer Prices Index will be transformed to provide new insight into consumer behaviour. Several retailers are sending us regular feeds of scanner data that together account for almost 50 per cent of the grocery market.
12. In December, our Data Science Campus work on developing real-time indicators at the local level from CCTV traffic camera images was awarded the Geography in Government overall and innovation awards, presented by Princess Anne at the Royal Geographical Society. These regularly published statistics are the first to be produced from machine learning techniques applied to image data.
13. The 1921 census was successfully transferred to The National Archives as part of our statutory duties, involving work across ONS to catalogue and transfer the records.
14. We continue to make progress on moving surveys online including moving over 37,000 Annual Business Survey forms to an electronic questionnaire by March. A procurement exercise to find a supplier to build the Statistical Business Register launched on 17 January – this will provide a replacement for the Inter-Departmental Business Register and a much-improved sampling frame for business surveys.
15. The consultation on the future of travel and tourism statistics closed before Christmas and work is now focused on the response and agreeing the future of the International Passenger Survey by April.
16. We have also been involved in the early stages in setting up the Unit for Future Skills, a Department for Education (DfE) priority to ensure our schools, colleges and training providers are supplying the skills that employers require. The Integrated Data Service is proposed as the platform solution to bring together a range of data for analysts across DfE, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), Department for Work and Pensions, HMT and wider uses for skills providers, employers and the public.
17. Following discussion on violence against women and girls at the October Board, we have worked collaboratively with other departments, support services and organisations to produce a first [analytical article](#) on the topic of violence against women and girls. This highlighted not only the scale and severity of the problem, but also where there are evidence gaps. All the evidence we've found is outlined in a data landscape which was also published. We are now working to fill these evidence gaps.
18. In December we published the cross GSS subnational data strategy and launched it at a subnational themed economic forum event. It was presented alongside two releases of new data and insights. The first on the most granular estimates of Gross Value Added that we have ever published and represent a significant step in publishing more data at building block level. The second provided analysis and data on the industrial structure of

towns and how this impacts on disparities between places. We are now focused on developing our work plans to meet the aims of the subnational data strategy.

19. Following extensive engagement across government, including with the devolved administrations, and a workshop to engage with academics, Chief Security Officers and others outside government, we collated information on a range of relevant initiatives to respond to the 46 specific recommendations of the Inclusive Data Taskforce. These have been drafted into a detailed implementation plan which will now be published on 28 January.
20. In December we published the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) annual report, an important milestone reflecting on the achievements over the last year. We have made good progress in reporting SDG indicators, filling increasingly challenging data gaps: we've doubled the amount of [headline data we report](#) for the UK, from 41 per cent in 2017 to 83 per cent in 2021, and increased the [disaggregations](#) underneath our headline figures.
21. In Newport, Alex Chisholm visited the office at the start of December. Alex was given a tour of the newly renovated office spaces as part of the Evolving the Workplace project along with meeting staff to discuss a range of topics for the ONS. This included security, the Data Science Campus, the COVID-19 Infection survey, and the labour market.
22. I am also delighted to report that two new Director Generals have started at ONS during January. Michael Keoghan joins us from BEIS to become DG for Economic and Social Statistics while our own Peter Benton becomes DG for Health, Population and Methods. Darren Morgan, Director of Economic Statistics Production, has also been appointed as our Head of Campus for the Darlington Economic Campus. Darren will be developing ONS's presence in Darlington and building key relationships across the local area.
23. Finally, five ONS employees have been recognised for their contributions to statistics, public health and the census in the 2022 New Year Honours list. They cover two vitally important areas: measuring the prevalence and impact of COVID-19 and the successful census field operation. Alex Lambert, Will Marks, Owen Abbott and Henrie Brown are awarded OBEs whilst Arron Maspero receives an MBE.
24. The end of the year saw a culmination of relevant and impactful work across ONS, but this year will require the organisation to step up to significant challenges. This will include the successful delivery of the IDS, progress on the ARIES programme, delivering the outcomes of the BASE review, developing admin-based population estimates, release of 2021 census outputs, and advising on the wider future of population statistics.

Professor Sir Ian Diamond, National Statistician, January 2022

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

SA(22)02

Update from the Director General for Regulation

Purpose

1. This paper provides the UK Statistics Authority Board with an overview of Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) activities.

Discussion

2. Our main areas of focus since the last Board meeting have been:
 - i. The Regulation Committee met in early December, and discussed papers on how OSR secures change, the National Statistics designation, population estimates, and held an initial discussion of OSR's business planning for 2022/23.
 - ii. Our business planning round for 2022/23 has begun. We would welcome any input from Board members on gaps in or concerns about statistics that OSR should focus on.
 - iii. One theme in our business planning is likely to be securing wider reach. This means that OSR's positive influence, very clear for official statistics, should reach beyond official statistics. OSR can and should support high standards of data use and publication in Government more broadly. We have had a couple of recent successes in this area:
 - The new protocols for the Government Social Research Service strongly feature the Code of Practice. This shows that other parts of the analysis function, beyond the statistics profession, are increasingly open to using Trustworthiness, Quality and Value as guiding principles.
 - We have had good discussions with the Evaluation Task Force, which aims to raise the standards of evaluation across Government, about how we can support their work.
 - iv. We have developed a clear and radical proposition for the future of the National Statistics designation. This is the subject of a separate paper. In essence, the proposal is to move away from the implication that National Statistics exist on a higher level of quality or importance. Instead, we want a much more straightforward recognition that National Statistics are those official statistics that OSR has reviewed and verified as meeting the standards of the Code of Practice.
 - v. Our campaign to encourage intelligent transparency of data used to support policy has been gathering momentum. We have convened two round tables, one of NGO bodies with an interest in transparency (e.g. Full Fact, Centre for Public Data) and the other involving public sector bodies (e.g. National Audit Office). In addition, I spoke to the Chief Scientific Advisors before Christmas – they strongly supported the campaign.
 - vi. In terms of transparency within specific departments, Mary Gregory and I have met the Director of Analysis of the Department of Health and Social Care; Mary has run a session for analysts in the new Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities; and we are running a session for analysis in the Department for Work and Pensions.
 - vii. Omicron led to an increase in casework during the pre-Christmas period. A lot of this related to transparency issues – for example, clarity around the modelling that was leading the UK's four governments to propose a tightening of restrictions. The OSR team has done a fantastic job in responding quickly, and with good judgement, to these concerns – pushing successfully for the release of data without allowing

ourselves to appear partisan or overly supportive of any particular perspective on the policy choices being made by governments.

- viii. In terms of wider communication and stakeholder engagement, Ian and I met the Auditor General for Scotland and identified a number of areas of mutual interest, especially around transparency of Scottish Government data. The Royal Society published a think piece from me to accompany the launch of their report on On-line information. I also spoke at two public engagement events for the Royal Society, setting out the nature of the UK's statistical system for members of the public. I wrote an opinion piece for Carnegie UK on measures of wellbeing. And I spoke at the Validate AI conference (chaired David Hand) about the role of OSR in providing assurance, based on our exams review.

Conclusion

3. On my mind at the moment are two things:
 - i. transparency issues: Although our campaign has gone well, it is clear that there are barriers to transparency across government. We have heard recent concerns about release of analysis in several different departments, including the governments in Scotland and Wales; and
 - ii. planning: developing the priorities for next year's business

Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation, OSR, 19 January 2021

List of Annexes

Annex A Regulatory dashboard

Regulatory Activities – January 2022 Authority Board

| Health and Social Care | Economy | Population and Society | Crime and Security | Children, Education and Skills |
|--|--|---|--|--|
| <p>Casework: Concerns raised about Covid data in Scotland, England and Wales.</p> <p>Assessment: Kicked off assessments on Family Practitioner Services statistics in Northern Ireland and NHS Education Scotland Workforce statistics.</p> <p>Systemic Reviews: Adult Social Care (GB) – Preparing for a further round of user engagement.</p> | <p>Assessments: ONS Productivity Statistics – Continuing discussions with ONS on progress against our requirements.</p> <p>ONS Country and Regional Public Sector Finances & ONS Regional GDP – Gathering feedback from users for these two assessments.</p> <p>Welsh Revenue Authority Statistics (WRA) – Draft assessment report being prepared.</p> <p>Systemic Review: Post- Brexit ONS Economic Classifications – Paper discussed at December’s Regulation Committee meeting. ONS is awaiting feedback from HMT on ONS’s latest governance proposals.</p> | <p>Measuring the population: ONS has shared plans to provide more-coherent communication to users. We plan to write to the National Statistician in early February to outline our concerns, with the hope it can also cover progress.</p> <p>Assessments: Census We continue to discuss how ONS and NISRA are working to meet the assessment requirements. NRS is due to publish its report on meeting the standards of the Code in February.</p> <p>Compliance check: Migration – First phase of a review of ONS plans for future migration estimates and outputs. Report due to be provided to February’s Regulation Committee.</p> <p>Casework: Migrant Crossings statistics, OSR letter published 17 November. Response from HO published 20 December. New regular publication for these statistics preannounced for February 2022.</p> | <p>Kicking off assessment of Home Office’s Police Officer Uplift statistics within the next month.</p> <p>Compliance checks: Published letters for ONS/Home Office Knife-Enabled Crime statistics and Department of Justice’s Northern Ireland Prosecutions and Convictions statistics.</p> <p>Completed desk research for Hate Crime statistics (Home Office, COPFS, PSNI).</p> <p>Casework: published Sir David Norgrove letter about leak of MoJ statistics on transgender prisoners.</p> | <p>Systemic Review: Children and Young People – Report will be tabled at February Regulation Committee. Anticipate publication early March with extensive follow up engagement with producers and stakeholders.</p> <p>Assessment: Key Stage 4 statistics in England – Kick off meeting with DfE on 17 January.</p> <p>GRADE data – letter sent to Ofqual, UCAS, DfE, ONS and Ofsted to congratulate them on this successful linkage and sharing of data around awarding of grades in 2020.</p> <p>Casework: Health and Wellbeing Census in Scotland – concerns raised around the confidentiality and ethics of the census of school age children.</p> |
| Labour Market and Welfare | Housing, Planning and Local Services | Agriculture, Energy and Environment | Business, Trade and International Development | Travel, Transport and Tourism |
| <p>Assessments: DWP Benefit Cap statistics: aiming for kick off meeting in January.</p> <p>ONS Employment and Jobs – following up with ONS ahead of formal report to February Regulation Committee meeting</p> <p>Compliance checks: ONS’ Small Area Income estimates – letter to be published in January. NISRA’s Women in NI due to be published by early February.</p> | <p>Assessment: Statutory Homelessness in England statistics: Assessment report published mid-December. Action planning meeting held with team with plan due to be published end of January.</p> <p>Compliance checks: Follow up meeting arranged for compliance check of Housing statistics produced by Homes England and continuing review of Planning applications in England statistics produced by DLUHC.</p> | <p>Assessment: People and Nature Survey assessment meeting held with new lead statistician at Natural England to discuss timing. Plan to shortly start desk research.</p> <p>Compliance checks: Flood Defence Spending statistics published 15 December.</p> | <p>Assessments: NI Broad Economy Sales and Exports statistics assessment report published December</p> <p>Compliance Checks: Preparing findings letters on three Compliance Checks – Robustness of UK Trade statistics to Economic Shocks, inclusion of VAT data into ONS’s Short-term Economic Output statistics and ONS’s Retail Sales Statistics to be published during the next few weeks.</p> | <p>Compliance checks: DfT’s new Transport Disability and Accessibility Statistics publication, and Transport Scotland’s new Disability and Transport publication.</p> <p>Travel and Tourism - Engaging with ONS on plans for future of the International Passenger Survey</p> <p>Systemic Review: Accessibility of Transport Networks – Addressing producer comments, working towards February publication.</p> |

| Data and Methods | Insight |
|---|---|
| <p>RAP – ONS looking at how to take forward some actions to progress the application of RAP principles across ONS. ONS team has undergone a restructure, so we are revising how we work with them going forward.</p> <p>QCovid – Completed desk research and evaluated the 42 lessons from the Exams Review against the use of the QCovid algorithm for risk prediction. Met with DHSC in January; no further meetings currently scheduled. The team will now focus on writing up their findings into a Blog.</p> <p>Model Guidance – Published alpha version of the guidance for comment and blog post. Revised version planned for publication in Q1 2022, along with a comms strategy, including a blog on Data in Government site.</p> <p>Methods - Main focus of work is supporting regulatory projects, including migration. Also providing input into NS designation quality workstream.</p> <p>Dashboard – Newly added classification tool, which classifies release calendar work into OSR domains. Working with Insight team to trial Power BI.</p> <p>Other – Work planning for 2022 in progress with return of function lead - Emily Barrington; hired HEO from graduate scheme and planned recruitment of a Data Lead.</p> | <p>Insight and Evaluation Committee – established a new committee to oversee the function, providing direction and challenge, with first meeting held in early December.</p> <p>Communicating Uncertainty in Statistics – In progress, due for completion end of March 2022.</p> <p>The Role of Official Statistics in Policy Evaluation – project approved and in progress, due for completion end of March 2022.</p> <p>Transparency – blog published and engagement ongoing. Roundtables taking place, and new guidance being drafted.</p> <p>Regulatory Insight – trialling use of Power BI to draw out key themes from regulatory work.</p> |
| Policy & Standards | Research |
| <p>9.30 release practice consultation – reviewing responses to the release time consultation</p> <p>NS designation review –submitting paper with recommendations to the Board in January</p> <p>Voluntary application and wider reach – added Skills for Care to list of adopters, preparing for launch of the VA award for 2022. Developing contacts and material to support understanding and use of TQV by other analysts e.g. data science and other functions</p> | <p>Public Confidence in Official Statistics Survey — Data processing is under way and the first draft of the technical report is due soon</p> <p>Public Perceptions of the Public Good, Collaboration with ADR UK — ADR have initiated the procurement process and we are currently working on a co-funding agreement.</p> <p>Internal Exploration of OSR’s Perceptions of the Public Good — Data collection will end next week and qualitative and quantitative data analysis will begin shortly.</p> <p>Communication — We have published a blog outlining the work of the research programme and our plan to develop a better understanding of statistics communication, highlighting the fact that we think it is better not to assume a deficit but to focus on the best ways to communicate statistics to the public.</p> |
| Cross Cutting Issues | |
| <p>Business planning for 2022/23 is developing well. All of our Domains and Functions have produced draft plans within the context of our overall strategy and areas of focus for 2022/23 and we have a second team event on 19 January with a focus on delivering impact. We will share a draft business plan with Regulation Committee in February.</p> <p>Held Theory of Change Workshop on 14 January with focus at organisational level. This will inform development of our maturity model and evaluation framework.</p> <p>Analytical leadership public event planned for February and considering follow up outputs to statistical leadership systemic review.</p> | |

Strategy and Business Plan Update

Purpose

1. This paper is the sixth quarterly update on progress against the delivery of the UK Statistics Authority strategy, Statistics for the Public Good.

Recommendations

2. Members of the Authority Board are invited to:
 - i. note progress against the delivery of the strategy; and
 - ii. consider areas of focus over the next three months.

Background

3. We are now into the second year of the strategy, and work continues at pace to meet our key strategic objectives. Across all of priorities progress is being made, exemplified by the results of the work of the COVID-19 Infection Survey team and the work they did right the way through Christmas to provide timely updates on the progress of the Omicron pandemic.
4. As we look forward to 2022, we are focussing on delivery – following the successes of the 2021 Spending Review settlement.
5. Looking back at what we said we would deliver, progress has been strong during 2021. In our strategy we set out to:
 - i. respond flexibly to the uncertainties and challenges of COVID-19, including tracking the impacts of new variants, and delivering long term value from the survey approach;
 - ii. provide an inclusive, trusted and engaging narrative on the UK's economic and social fabric and trends, addressing cross-cutting issues and providing analysis to inform and engage governments, policy makers and the wider public;
 - iii. build flexible and integrated analytical capabilities and data management tools to address COVID-19 and other priorities to enable the organisation to manage data and deliver analysis that cuts across organisational boundaries;
 - iv. deliver high quality, inclusive and efficient economic and social statistics that are internationally recognised, by streamlining our processes and blending administrative data with transformed survey capabilities with the capacity to answer key questions quickly;
 - v. deliver a successful Census in March 2021, deliver high-quality outputs from the Census in 2022 and make a robust recommendation on the future of the Census in 2023;
 - vi. deliver a revised and comprehensive system of population and migration statistics based on administrative data and a consolidated social survey platform, having successfully delivered the full benefits of Census 2021;
 - vii. take opportunities to advocate for improved statistical literacy – with the analytical community, Parliament, schools and media; and
 - viii. build our organisational capabilities and resilience supported by funding through the Spending Review 2022.
6. We have made good progress against these aims. Since the last quarterly update:
 - i. ONS has continued to provide regular and timely data and analysis to support decision making on COVID-19 to the centre of Government, including new work on behavioural responses to omicron and workforce absences using a variety of novel data sources, as well as urgent policy priorities outside of the pandemic such as supply chain disruption. Guided by the strategy's aim to embed this capability into

policy making more broadly, we have expanded the Policy Liaison Unit to a team of five individuals, including secondments into the COVID-19 Taskforce, Cabinet Office Supply Chains Unit, National Situation Centre, and Levelling Up Taskforce. This flexible and agile resource cuts across organisational boundaries and allows ONS to better reflect the needs of policy makers, ensuring decisions are informed by the latest and most relevant evidence and analysis.

- ii. The results of the 2021 People Survey show a continuation of the record high levels of staff engagement from 2020, with overall engagement levels well above the Civil Service average and higher than the Civil Service benchmark against six of the nine themes. These results will support the development of the refreshed ONS People Plan, at the heart of which is the inclusive and sustainable principles in the strategy. In November we launched the new Flexible Working Framework, putting on a long-term sustainable basis some of the changes during the pandemic to where and how staff can work.
- iii. Alongside preparing publication of the outputs from Census 2021, progress has continued on the radical strategic aim for a revised and comprehensive system of population and migration statistics. In November and December, ONS published a series of research publications including a time series of admin-based population estimates (ABPEs) for 2016 to 2020; new admin-based methods of measuring international migration; and feasibility research on admin-based labour market status (ABLMS). ONS is engaging with advisory groups on this work in advance of further research publications in 2022.
- iv. In line with the Authority's goal in the strategy to build public trust in evidence, the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) has taken a renewed focus on transparency of data used in government, working to set an expectation that evidence used in public debate is routinely published. The emphasis is on intelligent transparency, whereby data are used to inform rather than simply use casually or indiscriminately. Recently this campaign has included presentations to Chief Scientific Advisors in government, meetings of senior analysts in targeted Whitehall departments and beginning a series of civil society roundtables with transparency champions to best coordinate OSR's impact.

Discussion

7. The ability for us to continue to deliver against the strategy for its remaining three years has been consolidated by the Spending Review Settlement 2021, which represents a positive outcome for the UK Statistics Authority and a vote of confidence in the organisation and Statistics for the Public Good.
8. Over the coming period the focus will be on the following areas:
 - i. delivering the initial Census outputs in summer 2022 – including extensive consultation with local authorities prior to publication;
 - ii. building the sequence of Integrated Data Service system deliveries that lead towards the launch of Public Beta in the summer with cross government support, in advance of the next programme business case that is due in September;
 - iii. delivering planned improvements in price statistics and labour market statistics – following the funding received for Economic Statistics at the Spending Review;
 - iv. securing funding for the online version of the COVID-19 Infection Survey;
 - v. continuing the delivery of the findings of the Inclusive Data Task Force with the publication of a workplan later this month, ;
 - vi. promoting the value of subnational statistics to the understanding of local economic and social issues;
 - vii. building our portfolio of climate change statistics, working collaboratively with partners across and beyond Government as demonstrated by ONS leadership on the UK climate change portal launched at COP26; and

- viii. continuing our programme of improving data literacy – with the next stage being a workshop for Ministers that will be led by the National Statistician and Professor Sir David Spiegelhalter.
9. As discussed at the last full Authority Board in November, we are continuing to review our plans in the context of the Spending Review. We will be providing an update at the next Authority Board meeting with the aim of publishing progress in delivering Statistics for the Public Good and a revised Strategic Plan and, later in the year, a review of the strategy on its second anniversary. This occasion in the summer will be a chance to publicise the successes and outstanding aims of the strategy both externally and internally.

Conclusion

10. Following the Spending Review, we now have funding certainty across the business, with the exception of the future model for the COVID-19 Infection Survey as set out above. The focus for the next three months, and for the majority of 2022, will be on the delivery of the exciting programme of work that we received funding for.
11. We are also revisiting our strategic plan to ensure that the high-level objectives for the organisation and the timescales for delivery are sufficiently ambitious and accompanied by detailed delivery plans against which we can evidence progress across the broad front of work we are committed to.

**Nick Bateson, Director of Finance Planning and Performance and Rob Bumpstead,
Chief of Staff, 19 January 2022**

Integrated Data Service - Branding and Cloud Procurement Update

Purpose

1. This paper provides the Authority Board with an update on key elements of the Integrated Data Programme (IDP).

Recommendations

2. Members of the Authority Board are invited to note:
 - i. Baseline delivery for 2022; and
 - ii. Data Deal and Stewardship update.

Background

3. A critical enabler of the National Data Strategy, the Integrated Data Service will build on ONS expertise of handling big data and managing Trusted Research Environments. The service will enable data to be shared, standardised, linked and accessed using common tools. It will provide evidence to inform and underpin policy decisions and deliver better outcomes for citizens while maintaining privacy.

Discussion

Baseline 2022

5. The Programme team and workstreams, have developed the Integrated Data Service (IDS) scope for delivery throughout 2022, with three major releases. The roadmap provides the detail on the progression between the releases;
 - i. **New Private Beta** - Platform Capability: Spring 2022.
All functionality that is currently available on (Amazon Web Services) Private Beta, with defects resolved. Support for up to 40 users from across ONS and other Public Bodies
 - ii. **“Initial Public Beta”** Capability: Early Summer 2022.
All functionality from New Private Beta, plus streamlined accreditation of researchers and projects with support for up to 160 users, including accredited researchers from outside of Government; Collaborative research projects, across sectors.
 - iii. **Full Accredited Public Beta**: Autumn 2022 (following formal Cabinet Office Assessment)
All previous functionality plus significantly improved timeliness for government analysts to access data, including support for “bite-size query” access and support for up to 1,000 cross-sector users. A direct link between Analysis and Dissemination components of the service will also be introduced.
6. Formal Digital Economy Act (DEA) accreditation needs to follow *Full Accredited Public Beta*. In addition to each release, additional enhancements will be made through the year; improvements to performance, functionality and tooling will continue, and activity will be prioritised according to user and stakeholder feedback.
7. The scope and phased approach for 2022 delivery was agreed at December’s IDP Programme Board.

The Data Deal and Stewardship Update

8. The Data Deal is an approach to data access that is designed to enable quick and secure sharing and analysis of data across departmental boundaries through a set of principles-based data exchange agreements.

9. Supporting the Data Deal is a new data ownership model which simplifies accountability and responsibility for data deposited, donated or enabled according to principles of data exchange agreements within IDS. This is termed the Data Stewardship Model and provides data management across the IDS as a platform, but also within discrete data domain areas. Data Stewards will be a mix of IDS and Government Department owners and will facilitate access to data within their data domain area, reinforcing the data exchange agreements, being part of relevant approvals and oversight, as well as other core governance activities. The detail to underpin the high-level model is being developed for circulation in February 2022.
10. In the absence of DEA accreditation for IDS at present, we will test the operationalising of the Data Deal in the Secure Research Service. Alongside this work we will also explore the use of other legal gateways and the extent to which they enable broad access as part of provisioning data through initial public beta.

Strategy and Engagement Update

11. Following the recent board decision to adopt HMG branding for IDS, work is now underway to develop the brand and in parallel, a discovery for a web presence is about to launch.
12. As we move into the new year, the Programme have contacted all stakeholders to provide them with an update on progress and a forward look to key milestones for 2022, including the pathway to Public Beta in the Autumn. This communication was accompanied by recently developed products to help inform stakeholders about the service and what it can offer. This includes a 'Frequently Asked Questions' document, and an 'Our Offer' pamphlet.
13. The programme continues to mature plans to guide its public engagement and is currently refining its communication strategy and developing an engagement framework to help facilitate this.
14. An important element of the programme's public engagement is building and maintaining public trust in the use of data. To this end, a roundtable meeting has been scheduled with a cross-section of Privacy Groups in London on 10 February. This is one component of a wider dialogue on public trust. The public trust agenda, and IDS's role within that, was explored in a recent meeting between Health Data Research UK, Administrative Data Research UK and ONS, chaired by Sir Ian Diamond. Moving forward, this group will steer a campaign to shine a light on how data are used for public good to help generate public trust in use of data. IDS will be a critical component of this.

Conclusion

15. This paper has provided Members the key elements, updated and next steps of the IDP.

Alison Pritchard, Deputy National Statistician for Data Capability, ONS, 19 January 2022

Ambitious Radical Inclusive Economic Statistics Programme Update**Purpose**

1. This paper provides an overview and current position of the Ambitious Radical Inclusive Economic Statistics (ARIES) programme.

Recommendations

2. Members of the Authority Board are invited to:
 - i. note progress made across the programme to date, and our plans to continue this through the next spending review period; and
 - ii. offer feedback on the updates, most notably in the context of alignment with wider ONS and UK Statistics Authority plans.

Background

3. Following the ARIES programme update to the Authority Board in September 2021 it was agreed quarterly updates would be provided on an ongoing basis.
4. The ARIES programme currently focusses on the transformation of economic statistics within the Economic, Social and Environmental Group (ESEG) and has been in flight since April 2021. It consists of 11 individual projects spanning the core suite of economic stats and its key focus for 21/22 has been to progress development in the area of Labour Market and Prices statistics, begin our initiative to reduce reliance on legacy technology, and to design and plan the future transformation of Public Sector Finance statistics.
5. The programme remains true to its aims of supporting user needs (known and emerging) and driving a “One ONS” approach to design and delivery, working closely with other programmes and delivery partners. Most notable among these are Data Capability (DCap) for technology and data provision and Census Data Collection and Transformation Programme (CDCTP) for transformation of surveys, specifically:
 - i. social survey questionnaire, mode and sample changes to support the move from Labour Force Survey to Labour Market Survey (LMS); thereby improving quality and timeliness of Labour Market statistics; and
 - ii. a range of business surveys and a new Statistical Business Register to support quality and coverage of our business statistics and reduce use of legacy technology.
6. Looking to the future, ESEG submitted a broad ranging and ambitious Comprehensive Spending Review bid, evolving the next generation of ARIES, with the aim of continuing to develop our economic statistics whilst also incorporating social and environmental aspects under a single programme.
7. HM Treasury (HMT) have clearly signalled their priorities remain robust, quality economic statistics with particular focus on Labour Market, Prices and Public Sector Finances achieved through addressing legacy systems and outdated collection methods, along with reinvigorating the Wealth and Assets Survey to pre-2020 levels.

Discussion***Progress September 21- January 22***

8. Delivery progress over the last three months has been positive with notable successes being:
 - i. firm establishment of clear requirements and improved ways of working across ARIES and CDCTP to drive delivery of Labour Market transformation through use of an improved Labour Market Survey;

- ii. publication of well-received research and progress articles on use of scanner data in our Price statistics, and in partnership with DCap colleagues, the engagement of Google/CTS to develop systems to incorporate alternative data sources into live production;
 - iii. use of an automation solution to enable removal of Lotus Notes from National Accounts change processes in the final stage of testing, and roadmap and resources for re-engineering systems and methods away from Ingres technologies in place;
 - iv. completion of a series of discovery and design activities to support redevelopment of key Public Sector Finance systems and processes;
 - v. establishing the new National Statistician's Committee for Advice of Standards for Economic Statistics beginning with recruitment of the chair;
 - vi. improvements across our core National Accounts including introduction of double-deflation methodology on estimates within Blue Book 21, lifting of UK Gross National Income reservations by Eurostat and publication of subnational trade estimates on a balance of payments basis for the first time;
 - vii. publication of an article using innovative methods and VAT data to produce the most granular estimates of Gross Value Added (GVA) ever published (including Middle Layer Super Output Area and Travel to Work Area) with the building blocks (Lower Layer Super Output Areas) made available in the Secure Research Service as a key step towards user-defined geographies for economic data;
 - viii. publication 'in house' of experimental model-based estimates of regional GVA developed by Economic Statistics Centre of Excellence (ESCoE) as an early indication of the national statistics and published five months ahead of the official statistics, significantly improving timeliness; and
 - ix. completed a discovery to improve the pipeline for the use of VAT data in the regional accounts, particularly its quality, reliability and efficiency.
9. Despite some great progress, challenges have been encountered:
- i. organisational capacity to deliver ONS's portfolio has impacted progress with Digital Services Technology, project delivery, and data science/engineering skills particularly hard to find and retain;
 - ii. the decision to build a separate system designed for Prices' needs rather than use the strategic Statistical Production Platform (SPP) highlights the challenge of innovating at pace; and
 - iii. the cross-cutting nature of our Labour Market transformation has required investment and time to achieve clarity of requirements, alignment of delivery across ARIES, CDCTP and stakeholders and more transparent governance arrangements.

Quarterly Look-Ahead

10. Focus will remain on maintaining momentum and ensuring we have a body of design and planning to "springboard" ARIES into 22/23 and beyond, notably
- i. to implement telephone mode collection into the LMS (in addition to already live on-line collection) and begin National Statistic accreditation activity for LMS data with the Office for Statistical Regulation;
 - ii. completion of design phase on use of the Google Cloud Platform in Price statistics in early March and finalising the impact analysis of incorporating alternate sources into Consumer Prices Index including owner occupiers' housing costs and Consumer Prices Index before presenting to the Advisory Panel for Consumer Prices. This work will also be showcased across ONS in February;
 - iii. complete removal of Lotus Notes from National Accounts change management and begin implementation of legacy reduction work with initial focus on migration of results processing from Ingres systems to the SPP;
 - iv. complete Roadmap and plans for transformation of Public Sector Finance systems, processes and methods;

- v. continue to work with colleagues across DCap to ensure we have:
 - access to the right data to support the needs of the programme including agreeing ongoing integration with data suppliers such as HMRC for key data including Corporation Tax, Value Added Tax (VAT) and Pay As You Earn; and
 - clear, realistic roadmaps for systems and platforms needed to meet the ambitions of ARIES.
- vi. design of a sustainable system to implement regular production of very granular regional accounts (such as very granular GVA) and start work to develop similar estimates of Gross Disposable Household Income;
- vii. system improvements that will improve the efficiency of the production of quarterly regional GDP, and build and test of the improved VAT pipeline to introduce efficiencies and sustainability of how VAT data is used within regional accounts and wider across economic statistics;
- viii. delivery of an internal data strategy paper that will support innovative use of the wide range of rich data that ONS has available for use for levelling up and subnational statistics and analysis;
- ix. continued recruitment of workforce to support ongoing plans; and
- x. provision of an Outline Business Case for the programme over the next three years to HMT by the end of March.

ARIES and the Spending Review Plans

11. Work is well underway to shape the plans and organisation of the ARIES programme to reflect the increased scope and budget of the next three years. The refreshed programme will be structured in such a way as to ensure strong focus is given to complex, cross-cutting and/or high-profile change such as Prices, Labour Market and the various elements of the regional agenda across economic, environmental and social statistics. This reflects the strong steer of HMT and the need to establish a realistic but ambitious programme of change.
12. ARIES will need to maintain alignment with other programmes across the ONS portfolio and will be a key contributor to the ONS Business Planning round currently underway. This will ensure optimal sequencing of the programme needs in the context of ONS capacity. In a similar vein, impacts on operational commitments will need to be closely managed; in some areas “high disruption” may be felt as the result of initiatives such as legacy reduction.
13. The programme shares cross-cutting plans with a number of other ONS programmes and central functions, such as the development of subnational statistics and analysis and the reduction of legacy technology across the ONS IT estate. We will continue to work in partnership with these areas further embedding the ‘One ONS’ approach which has been a focus of the ARIES culture to date.
14. Research will continue to be vital over the next 3 years and links with this will be strengthened to maintain a strong flow of relevant transformation opportunities. ARIES will remain close to the work of the ESCoE and will make best use of the Economic Experts Working Group and the range of stakeholder forums in place across ESEG that gives direct access to the needs and insights of our users.

Conclusion

15. ARIES is making good progress albeit with some challenges along the way. It remains a key focus for our stakeholders including HMT as can be seen in the ambitions and funding set out in under SR21. ESEG is now poised to make best use of this, bringing together our economic, social and environmental statistics transformation. We would welcome observations on past progress, as well as any thoughts on future activities.

**Donna Leong (ARIES SRO), Economic, Social & Environmental Group, ONS, 19
January 2021**

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY BOARD

SA(22)06

National Statistics designation review

Purpose

1. This paper presents proposals for the future presentation and application of the National Statistics (NS) designation.

Recommendations

2. Members of the Authority Board are invited to:
 - i. approve the recommendation to emphasise the independent review of official statistics as serving the public good; and
 - ii. approve the recommendation to begin an implementation project.

Background

3. The Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) has undertaken an iterative process to gain a thorough understanding of how the NS designation is viewed and used by statistics producers and users. It began in autumn 2019 with an [exploratory review](#) including a roundtable with stakeholders and focus groups with members of the public. We undertook a period of desk research in 2020 reviewing similar practices in other countries and regulators, and we set up a steering group of experts from a variety of fields who have been instrumental in challenging our thinking.
4. We undertook a series of iterative conversations with producers in 2021. We also held conversations with a range of stakeholders. We published [the findings](#) from these activities in June, followed by an [ideas paper](#) in October. The sessions have helped shape proposals for the future of the designation which we present below, having been approved by the Regulation Committee in December 2021.

Discussion

5. We have found that for many producers and users 'National Statistics' has largely become irrelevant to their work and for some the term has been ambiguous and unhelpful.
6. At the same time, we have found a strong belief in the importance of the independence and accountability of producers and a recognition of the value of independent review. The Code of Practice for Statistics is upheld by producers as the standards they must follow, and they have expressed their commitment to doing so. Consequently, while 'National Statistics' as a label is no longer useful, the value of designation remains.
7. 'Designation' is a term we use to describe the independent review by the regulator that official statistics serve the public good by showing Trustworthiness, Quality and Value.
8. We are no longer thinking of National Statistics as an exclusive club; rather, we wish to emphasise the benefits of independent review for those statistics in contested areas and where producers would like to reassure their users about their standards. Our goal is to make designation matter to producers, to make it useful for users. We are looking to inspire producers to use designation to show their users that they meet the standards of Trustworthiness, Quality and Value. We want to see the application of the Code of Practice become proactive and integrated within these organisations, to maximise the benefit that using the Code framework can offer producer bodies, for their official statistics and beyond. These changes will better enable us to achieve our wider vision of statistics serving the public good.
9. We recommend an implementation project begin that focuses on three main areas:

- i. Simplified communication about the designation (OSR to lead):
 - develop and test ways of clearly and simply communicating about the status of statistics, as well as Authority judgements about compliance and non-compliance with the Code of Practice (including de-designation), in collaboration with communication experts, producers, users, and other stakeholders; and
 - enhance the designation inventory ([NS List](#)) to be an accessible and comprehensive information source with links to and from official statistics.
- ii. Producer culture and processes (jointly with the National Statistician):
 - encourage and inspire improvements in statistical practice by further embedding the Code pillars within official statistics producer organisations through advocacy, self-evaluation of compliance, promoting the benefits of independent review for improving statistical practice, protecting independence, and reassuring users, and encouraging the wider application of the Code pillars; and
 - develop, test, and promote the Code Maturity Model, including the means for OSR to conduct organisational reviews against the Code pillars.
- iii. Assessment process (OSR to lead):
 - adapt and develop assessment tools for investigating compliance of statistics with the Code that support rapid assessment against the standards of Trustworthiness, Quality and Value, and in-depth reviews such as relating to specific pillars or principles; and
 - support ongoing engagement with stakeholders, develop collation of user insight to feed into assessment, and establish a means to enable users to request reviews of statistics through OSR's website.

10. We have summarised in the table below how we see the key elements associated with designation staying the same or changing through these proposals.

| Element | Same | Different |
|---------------------|--|---|
| Designation | Assess and award designation | The process is re-defined as independent review by regulator that statistics comply with the Code by showing TQV |
| National Statistics | Remains legal name for designated statistics | Do not apply as label or badge to designated statistics – statistics include a statement with a link to OSR message explaining status |
| Official statistics | Published statistics applying the Code of Practice | Wider encouragement to put forward for assessment so potentially more become designated |
| De-designation | Continue to remove regulatory endorsement for clear non-compliance | Issue an Improvement Notice – require action and published plan Clearer statement alongside statistics of regulatory judgement of non-compliance with specific Code pillar |
| Assessment | Retain long form assessment for new producers | Develop rapid assessment for established producers |

| | | |
|-----------------------------|--|---|
| Deep dive reviews | Conduct systemic reviews of issues across statistics system | OSR conducts in-depth reviews of particular aspects of practice within producer organisation, e.g. quality management, methods, engagement |
| Organisational reviews | | OSR conducts stock take of performance in producer organisation using Code Maturity Model as framework and evidential base. Producers conduct self-assessment |
| Engagement | Ongoing user dialogue through domains, assessment and systemic reviews | Extend OSR engagement - ongoing programme of formal and informal dialogue with range of stakeholders supported by automated evidence gathering from the web and OSR documents to build insight and contacts |
| Producer quality assessment | Explain quality of statistics in supporting information and alongside statistics | Prominent description of analysts' judgement of the strength of the evidence about fitness for purpose of the statistics |

Benefits of this approach

11. This refocusing of the designation to focus on independent review helps meet the challenges of a data abundant world by getting away from the mystique of “National Statistics”. It is a simple message – that these statistics have been independently assessed. It presents opportunities for new forms of statistics and those presented in a wider variety of ways, such as dashboards, to be recognised as meeting the Code of Practice. This approach removes any lingering sense of a cliff edge between official statistics and National Statistics.

Risks

12. These changes may create a larger demand on OSR to conduct assessments. We propose mitigating this risk through applying a tailored, proportionate assessment process that targets the specific needs raised in the statistics. Our domain engagement and use of compliance checks also give us the means for ongoing monitoring of how producers meet the Code standards.

13. Focusing on compliance with the Code and showing Trustworthiness, Quality and Value, rather than the highest standards of the Code pillars may be interpreted as a lowering of standards. Rather, it is consistent with the requirements of the Statistics and Registration Service Act. Producers being clear about the strengths and limitations of the statistics and how they serve the public good, as well as being open about how they meet the Code standards, will provide reassurance to users.

14. We are looking to introduce new ways for producers to strategically apply the Code and think about quality which have the potential to appear burdensome. Success will hinge on the developments being a partnership with producers. Producers will voluntarily apply the Code Maturity Model and Quality Grade where they are found to be useful.

Conclusion

15. Assessment is still an important means of driving improvements in practice and giving reassurance to users. The transition proposed presents the opportunity to refocus the designation as well as statistical practice, to better achieve our vision of statistics that serve the public good.

**Penny Babb, Head of Policy and Standards, Office for Statistics Regulation,
18 January 2022**

COVID-19 Infection Survey and associated surveillance studies**Purpose**

1. This paper provides an update on the COVID-19 Infection Survey (CIS) programme.

Recommendations

2. Members of the Authority Board are invited to note:
 - i. the continued successful delivery and high impact of the CIS;
 - ii. recent successful milestones, and the rapid response to the Omicron variant to support urgent policy decisions; ongoing strategic development; and
 - iii. that the CIS programme remains at Amber, with considerable progress made in addressing key risks on the programme.

DiscussionOmicron Variant

3. ONS surveillance studies continue to deliver gold-standard evidence to inform government decision-making during the rise of the Omicron variant. The CIS was agile to the demands of the Omicron wave, tracking initial cases in week to 1 December and going on to provide positivity breakdowns by age, geography, and variant subtype, now published twice weekly.
4. CIS captured the unprecedented rise of Omicron: by 21 December 2021 one in ten people in London would have tested positive for Covid-19. Such was the national importance of these data, ONS published interim data on 24 December, in addition to scheduled releases, to inform government and the public during the festive period. Across government, the CIS has been championed as the best picture of what is happening in the pandemic across regions and age bands.
5. The official and ministerial Covid Operations meetings have welcomed our new work sector and occupation analysis, delivering estimates on positivity and self-isolation by sector, and vaccination by socio-demographic status and occupation which has now been updated with Census 2021 data.
6. CIS has additionally generated a range of novel insights including:
 - i. Predictors of positivity: on 21 December, we published early results from the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Infection Survey showing the characteristics of people more likely to be infected with the Omicron variant compared with the Delta variant. We updated the analysis to reflect the changing situation over Omicron's rapid growth, publishing again on 23 December.
 - ii. Antibodies: which have likely reflected the success of the booster rollout, as antibodies detected in England was at 97.5 per cent for week beginning 20 December, and at similarly high levels in other UK nations.
 - iii. Transmission: latest tranche analysis results are in line with previously established patterns of elevated external infection risk for children of school age, and reduced risk for those working in patient-facing roles. This is consistent with the expected impact of vaccination policy.
7. The early Opinions and Lifestyle Survey indicators provided to the Cabinet Office Covid Taskforce on 12 January included estimates on the use of face coverings, socialising indoors and outdoors, use of lateral flow tests, travelling to work and social distancing. There is evidence that Plan B has had an impact and that people have taken steps to moderate behaviour, especially older and more vulnerable groups. Although people

seem less concerned about the impact of the pandemic compared with the start of last year, the proportion of people who do not expect life to return to normal for more than a year has risen from 20 per cent to 35 per cent during the same period.

8. In addition to the CIS analysis, we have updated the mortality by vaccination status and are planning an update to the excess deaths analysis now non-Covid excess deaths are apparent in the data again.
9. Responding to the increased demand for timely statistics a temporary additional headline publication on Wednesday's has been added to the weekly rhythm. Additionally, messaging on new cases (incidence) has been given greater prominence in the Friday output.

Child immunity and schools infection study (SIS)

10. Findings from the first wave of the Schools Infection Survey were disseminated as Management information (MI) on 17 December and discussed with stakeholders. Results included antibody positivity among primary and secondary school pupils (generalisable to England); preventative measures in place in schools including ventilation; vaccine hesitancy among parents and secondary school pupils; pupil mental health; and Long COVID.
11. First analysis from the linked education and health data asset was released as MI on 17 December. This analysis focused on vaccination take-up among 12–18-year-olds in state education, disaggregated by gender, ethnicity and free school meals. Publication is scheduled for February with wave one results.
12. Wave two of SIS commenced on Monday 10 January. To date 150 schools and over 10,000 pupils are registered to participate. Antibodies of under 16s has also been collected in the CIS and publication is due at the end of January.

CIS Digital

13. The commissioning of the CIS beyond March 2022 is still under discussion with UK Health Security Agency. The business case is progressing well, and we anticipate formal approval by the end of the month.
14. Consequently, the ONS team have been working intensively to continue scoping and preparing to move to a digital first model with postal testing kits and on-line data collection. We are seeking to invest as much this financial year as possible to mitigate high transition costs next year.

Next Steps

15. The funding for the CIS is a priority to secure in the coming weeks, to enable planning and continuity across the programme and wider portfolio. The team will continue to prepare robustly for a rapid launch of and stepped wedge transition to the revised model.

Emma Rourke, Director, Health Analysis and Pandemic Insights, ONS, 19 January 2022.